United Nations A/HRC/30/NGO/132

General Assembly

Distr.: General
8 September 2015

English only

Human Rights Council
Thirtieth session
Agenda item 3
Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development

Written statement* submitted by the Make Mothers Matter - MMM, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[31 August 2015]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

GE.15-15239(E)

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The human right to safe drinking water and unpaid care work

Make Mothers Matter (MMM) extends its appreciation to the Special Rapporteur on Water and Sanitation for the opportunity to discuss his future work, and very much welcomes his plan to focus its 2016 thematic report on gender equality. This major issue definitely needs to be addressed in relation to the right to safe drinking water and sanitation, and in the context of the 2030 agenda.

Indeed, women and girls, particularly those living in rural areas in developing countries, are affected differently than men by the inadequate provision of safe drinking water and sanitation. They from a disproportionate negative impact on several other human rights, notably the right to education, the right to health and the right to decent life and work.

MMM would like to particularly draw the attention on the linkage between the right to water and the issue of unpaid care work, a key obstacle to gender equality.

Research shows that in sub-Saharan Africa, 71 per cent of the burden of collecting water for households falls on women and girls,[1] who in total spend 40 billion hours a year collecting water, i.e. the equivalent to a year's worth of labour by the entire workforce in France![2] Further, it is estimated that African women in rural areas walk on average 6 km a day to fetch water[3].

In effect, States' failure to provide for adequate provision of water is mostly compensated by women and girls' unpaid work, a time burden with significant health impacts that greatly contributes to gender inequality. One can even say that this "unpaid work subsidizes government by provisioning to households"[4].

The lack of access to basic infrastructure and technology (i.e. water and sanitation, but also energy, ICTs and other household technologies) forces women to dedicate a lot of time to fetching water and collecting firewood in addition to performing other domestic tasks and family care work, thus exacerbating women's unpaid care work. In turn, this huge total amount of time that women, most notably mothers, and girls spend on all such unpaid work for their families and their communities prevents them from engaging in income generating activities or education, thus contributing to perpetuate the circle of poverty.

The situation is exacerbated in families and communities affected by the HIV/AIDS pandemic where caring for an AIDS patient can increase the workload of a family caregiver by one third, with women performing between 70 and 90 % of this unpaid care work. A rural woman interviewed in Southern Africa estimated that it took 24 buckets of water a day, fetched by hand, to care for a family member who was dying of AIDS - water to wash the clothes, the sheets and the patient[5].

The availability, access to, and use of, critical infrastructure such as water and sanitation can significantly reduce the time burden and drudgery of the unpaid work of fetching water that mostly falls on women and girls. Research in Tanzania has shown that a one-hour reduction for every 10 hours per week spent on water and firewood collection

[1] Millennium Development Goals Report 2012

[2] United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Human Development Report 2006: Beyond Scarcity: Power, Poverty and the Global Water Crisis. p. 47

[3] UN fact sheet on the Human Right to water http://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/human_right_to_water.shtml

[4] Indira Hirway: "Unpaid Work and the Economy: Linkages and Their Implications", Levy Economics Institute of Bard College, May 2015

[5] UNAIDS, UNFPA and UNIFEM 2004 report 'Women and HIV/AIDS: Confronting the Crisis' , cited in UNDP Policy Brief on Unpaid Care Work, October 2009

increased the probability that women would engage in off-farm business activities by 7%[6]. Similarly, a project in rural Morocco, which reduced the time girls spent fetching water, resulted in a 20 per cent increase in girls' school attendance[7].

As part of its mission to support mothers around the world, MMM advocates for the development of such infrastructure that would reduce their workload: working jointly with the UNESCO NGO Liaison Committee, MMM invited one of its member organisations, Aide à la Jeunesse Africaine Défavorisée (AJAD) to participate to the Forum on access to safe water, which was organised in July 2014 in Yamassoukro, Cote d'Ivoire, by UNESCO in collaboration with the government of Cote d'Ivoire. This Forum resulted in the Yamassoukro call for action: "one for all, all for water!", and the creation of a network of NGOs, RONUCI, led by MMM member AJAD and committed to implementing the call for action in Cote d'Ivoire[8].

In conclusion:

- The right to water and sanitation is therefore, not only a basic human right: it is also key to gender equality and women economic empowerment.

- The development of basic public infrastructure and services such as water and sanitation, associated with low cost technology and the development of other key infrastructure such as energy, transportation and ICTs should therefore be a key priority of governments in developing countries, not only for obvious health purposes, but also with the explicit objective of reducing unpaid work and supporting women empowerment. It is also a matter of political will.

- Time-use surveys are necessary to make the unpaid work of collecting water and other unpaid family care work visible, and to monitor the implementation of public infrastructure and services development policies. They should be regularly conducted and the data collected should be disaggregated by sex and age, measuring simultaneous activities, including and differentiating housework, care of persons and firewood/water collection in order to best inform and monitor gender-sensitive policies[9].

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[6] Seebens H., 2006, 'The Contribution of Female Non-Farm Income to Poverty Reduction', background paper prepared for Ellis, A., M. Blackden, J. Cutura, F. MacCulloch and H. Seebens, 2007, Gender and Economic Growth in Tanzania: Creating Opportunities for Women, Directions in Development series, The World Bank, Washington, D.C. – cited in UNDP Policy Brief on Unpaid Care Work, October 2009

[7] UN Water, Gender, Water and Sanitation: A Policy Brief, 2006.

[8] More information on http://www.makemothersmatter.org/ficdoc/1407_MMM_AJAD_ACCES_EAU.pdf

[9] Esquivel, Sixteen years after Beijing: What are the new policy agenda for time-use data collection? Feminist Economics 17:4 2011, pp.215-238